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C A N D O U R:

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O F T H E

S A L I S B U R Y C O M E D I A N S.

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Actors, as Actors, are a lawful Game,  
The Poet's Right, and who shall bar his Claim?

CHURCHILL.

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L O N D O N:

Printed for R. HORSFIELD, Ludgate-Street.

M D C C L X V I I I.

CANDOUR

AN

ENQUIRY

INTO THE REAL

MERITS

OF THE

SALISBURY COMEDIAN



By J. H. Sturt, Esq.

Author of 'The History of the British Museum'

7

1850

London



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C A N D O U R:

A

P O E M.

“ ’T I S with our Judgments as our Watches, none  
“ Go just alike, yet each believes his own.”

Partial and blind, some ridicule Mankind,

Nor fancy Merit, which they cannot find:

Others more kind, allow no Faults, and raise

Their feeble Pipes, to whistle feeble Praise.

When Youth and Folly, fast link'd, hand in hand,  
O'er Reason's Throne usurp unjust Command,  
With Self-Importance big, tread down all Rules,  
And damn that Merit, which beholds them Fools,

B

With some small share of Learning write, and write,  
 And pass for Critics, e'en in Nature's Spight:  
 Candour, surpriz'd, in Wonder lifts her eyes,  
 And almost hates the Wretch, who thinks them wise.

Is there a Man so lost to Sense, and Shame,  
 So void of Honour, and so dead to Fame,  
 Can there be such a One—so lost 'mongst Men,  
 To give Applause, where Justice should condemn?  
 Meanly to flatter, wheedle, lie, beguile,  
 And, humbly fawning, court an Actor's Smile?  
 If such a one there is—O! let him wear  
 The shameful Shackles of a Strolling Play'r:  
 Let him be thought of all bad Men the worst:  
 See, Candour smiles, and owns the Sentence just.

Search through the World, and, own, thou canst not find  
 A Thing so lost to Virtue, and Mankind:



So mean, so false, so servile, and so base:  
 Reflecting so much Shame, so much Disgrace  
 On God and Man: Which ne'er deserv'd a Friend:  
 Which Reason cannot love, nor Truth commend:  
 Thou canst not find, search Earth, Seas, Skies, and Air,  
 A Thing, so worthless as a Strolling Play'r.  
 Vilely dependant on the public Good,  
 How low they stoop to gain precarious Food:  
 Half fed, half famish'd, lazy, proud, and vain:  
 The very Thought of Labour gives them Pain:  
 In Sloth, and Idleness, their Hours they waste,  
 Corrupt our Morals, and debauch our Taste.

Thus Prudence argu'd—But, Sir—it can't be true,  
 Why, Plays are Sermons in a different hue:  
 Search through the World, you'll find, in ev'ry Age,  
 Vice has severely smarted on the Stage:  
 It brings Mens Follies to their Bosoms home,  
 And, was the School of ATHENS, and of ROME.

Stop; stop—cries Prudence—stop—in that blest'd Time,  
 Nor Sense, nor Modesty, was held a Crime:  
 No plays were there with catching Lewdness fraught,  
 No not a single, prurient, luscious Thought:  
 In that blest'd Age—I grant ye—when, they say,  
 Men, for the Moral only, saw the Play:  
 In that blest'd Age—the Stage might be a School  
 Of Virtue: and of Life the truest Rule;  
 But, now! Appearances are altered quite:  
 Our Folks, thank Heav'n, distinguish Wrong from Right:  
 Those antient Puppies, with nor Fire, nor Taste,  
 Let all their Stock of Learning run to waste:  
 Preach'd up dull Lessons to correct the Mind,  
 And wrote to teach, not to amuse, Mankind;  
 Our Bards pursue ends diff'rent quite from these,  
 And, true to Int'rest, only strive to please:  
 Secure they write, no Brother Authors frown,  
 For each, in Turn, with Nonsense cheats the Town;



Our Stage, unlike the modest Stage of yore,  
 Is the great public Shop for Rogue and Whore:  
 Trust not thy Daughter there—for, ten to one,  
 Some Lord may see her, and—the Girl's undone:  
 Trust not thy Son—for, in this virtuous Place,  
 (When strong Temptation stares him in the Face  
 Dress'd, and trick'd out, with ev'ry Female Art,  
 T'ensnare the Sense, and captivate the Heart)  
 His young Blood beating high with Love's Alarms,  
 He'll fall a Victim to some Harlot's Charms.

O! 'tis too much good Prudence—by your Leave,  
 Such monstrous Fibs I must not, can't, believe—  
 Good faith! you're blind, or see through partial Eyes,  
 And, old yourself, the moderns you despise:  
 Else why of ROME, and ATHENS, do you bawl?  
 A SHAKESPEARE'S Genius far outsoars them all—

Into the Street your Daughter ne'er should stray,  
 For, 'tis a Place more public than the Play—  
 And on a Sunday shut up ev'ry door,  
 Your Son may go to Church, and—see a Whore.

I honour GENIUS wheresoe'er 'tis found,  
 Whether on holy, or theatric, ground;  
 So long as 'tis but found, I care not where,  
 Or if the Man's a Parson, or a Play'r:  
 And if ten thousand musty, prudent, Fools,  
 Preach up ten thousand musty, prudent, Rules,  
 I will protect, defend it with my Blood:  
 'Tis Genius calls, and sure the Cause is good.

Pray what is all the Learning, that is taught,  
 The Pride of Schools, with meagre Study bought?  
 Too dearly bought, if Genius does not lend  
 Her kindly Aid, and rank herself its Friend:



What is it more than Lumber, nicely stor'd,  
Which neither Joy nor Profit can afford?  
Like luscious Wine in some thick Cask close pent,  
'Till piercing Genius comes and gives it vent.

Tell me, grave Prudence, where's the mighty Fault,  
If once a Week behind the Scenes I'm caught?  
You say 'tis wrong—what right have you to scan,  
And blame, the Pastime of another Man?  
Believe me, Friend, 'tis fretful, peevish, Age,  
With nothing pleas'd, that makes you hate the Stage:  
Review your Life—your Manhood, and your Prime—  
Tell me, if then you thought a Play a Crime:  
Or are you thus to second Childhood grown,  
Without some darling Passion of your own?  
Tell me, I say, if, at this very Hour,  
You do not pine for Gold, or sigh for Pow'r?  
Or is't some diff'rent Folly you pursue?  
Perhaps you keep a Coach, and Whore, for shew:

Perhaps the Charms of some fine Butterfly  
 With wond'rous Magic captivate your Eye:  
 Or else, sworn Foe to Reason, Sense, and Truth,  
 You spend your Time in finding Fault with Youth.

What is there in that specious Name of Age,  
 That should our Homage, or our Fears, engage?  
 You say, we ought to rev'rence grey Hairs:  
 Judge of the Tree, I say, by what it bears,  
 Not by its Blossoms—shall a Man grown old  
 In Vice, in ev'ry Sin securely bold,  
 Shall he, forsooth, proscribe my best Delight,  
 Because my Hairs are brown, and his are white?  
 'Twas ne'er design'd—I never will agree  
 To let a Wretch of Eighty govern me:  
 Submit my Reason to a Dotard's Rule!  
 Forbid it Heav'n—I am not quite a Fool.



Though thus I prate, my Knee I'd humbly bend  
 To the sage Counsel of a real Friend :  
 Whose Silver Locks, with wise Experience fraught,  
 Point me th' unerring Road, in which I ought  
 To steer: From peevish, partial, Fondness free :  
 A Friend to Reason is no Foe to me.

So far from LONDON—I shall die with Spleen—  
 “ No Balls, no Plays, no Op'ras to be seen,  
 “ No Routs, no Drums, no Objects of Delight  
 “ To kill the Day, and while away the Night :  
 “ O!—I'll get back—I hate your Country Air,  
 “ It poisons Pleasure, and engenders Care.”  
 The Players are come—“ Pshaw—Damme if I stay—  
 “ O Lord!—I can't survive a Country Play—  
 “ Pardon me, Sir—it may go down with you—  
 “ But for a Critic, Sir—it cannot do.

Thus spoke a Coxcomb, who had left off Trade,  
 But, Curse of Curses! had scarce learn'd to read:  
 The City and the Shop he left at once:  
 Turn'd Gentleman, and stood forth Fool, and Dunce.

Is GENIUS then confin'd to any space?  
 Does she not spring at every Time, and Place?  
 Can the unwholesome Fog of City Air  
 Win her, coy Dame, and fix her only there?  
 Search the Town through—what Genius meets your Eyes?  
 See Fool on Fool, and Knave on Knave, arise;  
 The well fed Alderman, whose ev'ry With  
 Lies grossly center'd in some favourite Dish:  
 Who, beastly Gluttony his only Rule,  
 Thinks ev'ry Man, besides his Cook, a Fool:  
 Amongst the pamper'd Partners of his Feast  
 Might be a Genius, and a Man of Taste:  
 But with more mod'rate Men, who judge aright,  
 His Genius is a filthy Appetite.



The plodding Cit, whose eager Hopes pursue  
 Meanness and Craft, if Int'rest is in View,  
 Muses, and seems to think, but, still in Doubt,  
 Owns, in himself he can't find Genius out,  
 If it means otherwise than shrewd Deceit  
 To over-reach a Fool, or fix the Bait  
 For open honesty—away, thou Slave!  
 Thy Genius is the Genius of a Knave.  
 See the pert Templar with his Jemmy Wig,  
 The Man of Consequence with Nothing big,  
 Men of the Gown, whose Reading is but small,  
 Great Lords, and Dukes, who never read at all,  
 Spruce Valets, Barbers, Milleners, and Whores,  
 Rich Pimps, poor Poets—Bailiffs at their Doors!

The Playr's are come—what Glee in ev'ry Face!  
 All but AVARO's Foe to human Race:  
 Another's Joy to him no Pleasure brings,  
 He sickens at the Sight, and Scorpion's Stings

Wound his foul Soul; dares any but commend,

AVARO must not, cannot be a Friend:

Revile Mankind, strike deep, all Shame forego:

AVARO loves, and cannot be a Foe.

How have I heard him, through the livelong Day,

In Noise and Nonsense, talk long Hours away:

Of Men and Manners infamously prate:

And with his feeble Touch repair the State:

Bend e'en good Sense and Learning to his Will,

When all his Knowledge lies in doing ill;

Round him what Crouds of Politicians run,

There buzz like Flies o'er Carrion in the Sun:

Not Priests, most fervent in the Act of Pray'r,

Can with more eager Zeal to Church repair:

Not Maids, most longing for they know not what,

Can with more Joy receive the bridal Knot:



Not needy Lawyer, fond of weighty Fee,  
 Expects with greater Haste the last Decree,  
 Than these rank Fools, impatient of Delay,  
 Wait to receive the Slander of the Day.

The Play'rs are come — fee ——— Frown,  
 And, grumbling, with the Rascals out of Town:  
 To pliant Justice, lo! the old Man flies:  
 By him apply'd to, Justice ne'er denies.  
 See him bid Shades of fancy'd Want appear,  
 And chill each Soul with Riot's empty Fear,  
 Place Poverty enrag'd at every Door,  
 Paint e'en with Tears, the Mis'ries of the Poor:  
 Then see him bite his Lip, and hang his Head,  
 To find that common Sense was not quite fled:  
 To find that Reason all his Proofs withstood,  
 And deem'd a public Pleasure public Good.

The Play'rs are come—pray have they fix'd the Day  
 Dear Lady Bet?—Do you know when they play?  
 I die till they begin—will you subscribe?  
 'Tis helping a poor, starving, ragged Tribe——  
 Is COLLINS with them?—he is quite the Thing——  
 His Wife too?—Don't you know her?—Mrs. KING.

Subscriptions open lie—Fame caught the Sound,  
 And born on Folly's Wings, it spread around:  
 Fond of the Bubble, Men by Myriads run  
 E'en from the rising to the setting Sun:  
 See yonder ABIGAIL, yon Footman see,  
 Who ne'er at Country School learn'd A, B, C;  
 See how they start, and mutter, as they go,  
 She's playing JULIET, and he ROMEO.  
 What Creature's that, with that affected Stare,  
 So clean, so smart, he cannot be a Play'r?  
 How loud he talks! and ev'ry Time he speaks,  
 What bursts of Laughter from his Comrade breaks?



Why that's a Fool, a B——r, and a Beau,  
 Who sets his ev'ry Thing to public Show :  
 A strutting Coxcomb, who, by Fortune grac'd,  
 And high above his Brother Beggars plac'd,  
 O'er swoln with Pride, cocks up his empty Head,  
 " And scorns the Dunghill where he first was bred."

Fame sounds aloud—" Subscriptions open lie"—  
 See Fool, with Fool, with Coxcomb, Coxcomb vie  
 Who shall be first—For, in so great a Cause,  
 The first Subscriber had the most Applause ;  
 Applause ! 'twas neither gen'rous, kind, nor free,  
 'Twas nothing else but mean Economy.

Suppose the Distance of some little Time,  
 (This you must do, with Folks who trade in Rhyme)  
 Suppose each Art, which Fancy could devise,  
 To captivate the Heart, or please the Eyes,

By wise Precaution fix'd—suppose then too,  
 (You must suppose it, or 'twill never do)  
 That nice Decorum, Order, by her Side,  
 With Skill, and Conduct, o'er the whole preside;  
 Suppose too, OSMOND dances very fine,  
 And that each drunken Fiddler plays divine:  
 Suppose each Character completely dress'd,  
 And that they strive—in short, suppose the best.

How arduous is the Task, if well I ween,  
 T'express the Passions of a well wrote Scene:  
 Where ev'ry Struggle, ev'ry Pause, each Start,  
 Should show the Workings of a feeling Heart:  
 Happy the Man, and great indeed his Praise,  
 Who, scorning Art, and true to Nature, plays  
 Thus, from his Soul, free from those flimsy Baits,  
 Which Fools may catch at, but which Reason hates.



Yet, do we find Self-prejudice so great,  
 Amongst these Tinsel Images of State,  
 That ev'ry little, ragged, puny, Elf  
 Swears, that all Merit centres in himself:  
 It rests not there—so great's the Love of Fame,  
 The Candle-snuffer too puts in his Claim:  
 The Wretch that sweeps the Stage, the Dresser too,  
 Bring all their wondrous Merit forth to view:  
 Hear them, for Days, their pretty selves display!  
 Who dresses, sweeps, or snuffs, so well as they?

Come then, my Muse, and free as fleeting Air,  
 Lay bare their Bosoms, show them as they are:  
 Stranger to Calumny, impartial steer,  
 Nor praise, nor discommend, through Pique or Fear:  
 If Merit's found, though all the World deny,  
 Approve that Merit, give the World the Lie:

But if Conceit, or Arrogance, dare own  
 The Wreath to Genius due, to her alone,  
 Then wing thy Flight, with bitt'rest Rancour sped,  
 And tear th' ravish'd Honours from their Head.

Fond of low Humour, JOHNSON first we see,  
 (How well the Humour and the Man agree)  
 In that, indeed, his Praise can be but small,  
 We give enough, by giving none at all.  
 The modest JOHNSON—laugh now if you can—  
 LOTHARIO says, he is a MODEST MAN!  
 He, who in playing, only strove to play,  
 And who in saying, only strove to say,  
 He, who, for any thing we know, might be  
 A man of fortune, and of Quality:  
 Whose Quality, for ought we know, is small,  
 And he, God blefs him, of no Worth at all:  
 LOTHARIO says, dispute it, if you can,  
 That JOHNSON is a VERY MODEST MAN!



Why must SCIOLTO, almost through the play,  
In Labour hard, scarce find out Words to say?  
Why, at the Bottom of his Belly pent,  
Must he still groan, and quirk, to give them vent?

In the last Scene, the pleasing Diff'rence view:  
There give him Praise, for greatest Praise is due;  
See the old Man, just on the Verge of Death,  
Bless his CALLISTA with his feeble Breath:  
Such Tendernefs, such Nature, in his Face,  
That even ROSCIUS must have felt Disgrace  
Had he been there—behold his Death—he slept  
As good Men sleep—I saw it all, and wept.

Why then, thou Fool, with Talents such as these,  
Wilt thou, with Anticks vile, take Pains to please?  
Leave off Grimace, it makes thee but appear  
A fit Jack Pudding for a Dancing Bear.

Next COLLINS comes—I know him by his Strut—  
 A Hero quite, the Scene at Lilliput.  
 See how he grinds his Teeth, and strikes his Head,  
 And, on his Toes, he scorns the Earth to tread;  
 Such monstrous Action never can be just,  
 Too oft repeated, it must give Disgust.

In Comedy, his nat'ral Road to Fame,  
 So free, so easy, Censure cannot blame;  
 In Scenes where Passions quick on Passions rise,  
 I see thee, COLLINS, see thee with Surprise:  
 The nice Transitions, I with Joy survey,  
 And, charm'd, the Debt to Merit gladly pay.

Behold the mighty DUNN—he rants, he roars,  
 And on the Wings of Tragedy he soars  
 Above all human Reach—see how he raves,  
 And, in one settled Burst of Noise, he braves



Heav'n, Earth, and Hell—see him writhe to and fro,  
 And make e'en Pleasure wear the Face of Woe:  
 See one Arm stretch'd, whilst useless hangs the other,  
 'Till call'd to Action by its weary Brother.

In PIERRE he roar'd so loud, that, all amaz'd,  
 The fearful JAFFIER, trembling, stood, and gaz'd,  
 Upon my Soul! I thought, that in his Rage,  
 He would have thrash'd, or kick'd him off the Stage.

GAUDRY no Marks of real Merit brings,  
 The Creature cannot speak—he sweetly sings—  
 Strong Affectation, superficial Art,  
 Mark ev'ry Line, and mangle ev'ry Part:  
 Yet, in an Age like this, he still must please,  
 He sings with Taste, with Judgment, and with Ease.

In this soft Age, when even Sense is found  
 To lose her Charms, without the Charms of Sound :  
 When Op'ra, waving high her Magic Wand,  
 (And SHAKESPEAR quite forgot,) subdues the Land :  
 When JOHNSON, OTWAY, all our Nation's Pride,  
 For Noise, and Nonsense, are thrown quite aside :  
 Is not some Tribute to those Mem'ries due,  
 Who brought all Nature forth, and at a View  
 Saw through the whole?—Nor slavish Awe, nor Fear,  
 Shall check a Sigh, or stop the grateful Tear :  
 All the Muse can, whilst Reason holds, she'll give,  
 And, when she loves not, may she cease to live.

If, like a School-Boy, drawling in one Note,  
 And barely whining out his Parts by rote ;  
 If Marble Stiffness has a Pow'r to please,  
 And Memory atones for want of Ease:



WOOD may stand foremost in the List of Fame:

No Man so perfect, and no Man so tame.

LEWIS, with various comic Pow'rs endu'd,  
 Produc'd by Nature, in her merriest Mood,  
 Stranger to that low, paltry Bait, Grimace,  
 His very Soul seen clearly in his Face,  
 Comes, (though scarce known) with HUMOUR, by his Side,  
 To LAUGHTER link'd, his pleasing, wanton, Bride.

In DRUGGET—Gods! the House was in a Roar—  
 Who ever saw such sterling Strokes before?  
 That Mirth, which he, and he alone, can raise,  
 At once proclaims his Merit, and his Praise.

Let shallow Critics, who in Love with Sound,  
 Care not a Pin if Action's never found:  
 Let them (how few are known, how very few!  
 Who fairly give to Merit, Merit's due)

Sail with the Tide, and just like other Men,  
 Praise with the World, and with the World condemn:  
 Let them, who, fond of superficial Art,  
 Are seen, surpriz'd, at Nature's Name to start:  
 Let Fool, with Fool, their slender Voices raise  
 To sing thy Merits, COLLINS, and thy Praise,  
 On me it works not—from my Censure free,  
 Let them swear BELLAMY's out-done by thee:  
 Let wondrous Men most wondrously proclaim  
 In wondrous Words, the Wonders of thy Fame:  
 Let the united Voice of all the Town  
 Confess thee great, and thunder thy Renown:  
 The Muse, by Truth supported, shall not join  
 To court thy Favours, in a single Line:  
 Thy just Desert, with Pleasure, she'll rehearse,  
 But will not stain, with Flattery, her Verse.

In those gay Scenes, where Reason is scarce known,  
 Where Pleasure, modish Pleasure, rules alone;



Where, quite absorb'd in Folly, we may see  
 The Picture of our modern Quality,  
 COLLINS unrival'd stands—But, fond of Fame,  
 Soaring to Tragedy, she sinks with Shame:  
 No moving Accents from that Tongue we hear,  
 Which melt the Soul, and claim the pitying Tear,  
 That fine Variety, which diff'rent Parts  
 Conveys, at diff'rent Times, to feeling Hearts,  
 From her we feel not; she is still the same  
 In ev'ry Thing she plays, but in the Name.

When tender BELVIDERA, full of Grief,  
 At her stern Father's Feet implores Relief:  
 See that stern Father no Emotion show;  
 She hiccup'd out poor BELVIDERA's Woe,  
 Croak'd like a Raven, and, but that his Part  
 Directed him to ease her aching Heart,

She might, (so faintly did she urge her Pray'r)  
Without success, have croak'd a Twelvemonth there.

See, WESTON comes—without Finesse, or Art,  
She charms the Sense, and steals upon the Heart.

Good God! cries Critic, can that Creature please,  
Without one Spark of Meaning, Grace, or Ease?—  
“ If, to her Share, ten Thousand Errors fall,  
“ Look in her Face, and you'll forget them all.”

Next, Mrs. JOHNSON see—if I condemn,  
May I ne'er see true Modesty again :  
O! 'tis a Flower indeed, so seldom found,  
So very seldom on theatric Ground,  
That it deserves our utmost fostering Care,  
To cherish, to protect, and keep it there.



See Folly, in ecstatic Pleasure, mad,  
 See common Sense chagrin'd, and Reason sad,  
 See mighty Kings, with Clowns, advance in Jigs,  
 See Gods in Blankets, Angels in Bag-Wigs,  
 See Men, transform'd to Gods, by magic Spell,  
 Haul'd up to Heav'n, like Buckets from a Well,  
 See Jove, enrag'd, his awful Whiskers handle,  
 And flash his Light'nings from an Inch of Candle;  
 Whilst from the rumbling of some Mustard Bowl,  
 At his all pow'rful Nod, dread Thunders roll.  
 Wonders on Wonders press upon the Sight,  
 They're gone—for ever sunk, in endless Night.

T H E E N D.

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See Polly, in column 1st, and  
see common sense changed, and Reason and  
see mighty things with Christ, and in the  
see God in himself, and in the  
see man, transformed to God, by magic  
and up to heaven, like Huckleberry Finn  
see love, and his angelic wisdom  
and faith his lightnings from an inch of  
thine from the number of some things  
his all powerful God, and I think  
and on Wonders press upon the eye  
see's gone—for ever last, in earth's light



THE END



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